

How Your Unemployment Insurance Benefits Are Determined

Making a
Difference

E Department of
Employment
and Training



The "monetary" amount of your unemployment insurance (UI) claim — how much you may be able to collect if you meet all eligibility requirements — is determined by the earnings paid to you over a 52-week period of time defined by Massachusetts law. This is known as your "base period."

In the past, only if you did not have enough wages to establish a claim, could an "alternate base period" be used. However, because of a law passed in December 1994, claimants may be eligible to select the alternate base period, under certain circumstances specified in the law, which are outlined below.

If there are gaps in your employment history — or your wages have increased or decreased any time during the past 15 months — you should read this information before filing your claim.

How Your Base Period is Determined

The "primary base period" — that is, the time period that is first used to calculate all unemployment insurance claims — is the last four completed calendar quarters immediately preceding the date your claim is effective.

When the alternate base period is used, your claim would be established based on the wages paid to you during the three most recently completed calendar quarters plus the period of time between the last completed quarter and the effective date of your claim.

How Your Benefits Are Calculated

\$ To understand this process, it is important to know how your benefits are determined. Once your claim is established, a "benefit credit" is calculated. The benefit credit is the total amount of benefits you are potentially eligible to collect during your benefit year if you meet all the other eligibility requirements of the law.

Your "benefit year" is the 52 weeks following the effective date of your claim.

A "benefit rate" — the amount of your weekly benefits — is also calculated. It is based on your average weekly wage during your two highest quarters. As of October 1995, the maximum benefit rate is \$347 a week.

Your "duration of benefits" — the maximum number of weeks you are eligible to collect benefits — is determined by dividing your benefit rate into your benefit credit. The maximum number of weeks a claimant can collect regular benefits is 30 weeks. The maximum benefit credit is \$10,410 — \$347 a week for 30 weeks.

Understanding the Primary Base Period

Massachusetts employers are required to report wage information quarterly to the state's Revenue Department. This means that wages are reported in April, July, October and January. This is the information used to determine your potential monetary eligibility for UI benefits. When the "primary" base period is used, benefits are based on wages paid in the last four completed quarters.

Commonwealth of
Massachusetts

Department of
Employment and
Training

Nils L. Nordberg,
Commissioner

If your claim effective date is in:	Your benefits are based on wages paid	
	From:	To:
October/November/December 1995	October 1, 1994	September 30, 1995
January/February/March 1996	January 1, 1995	December 31, 1995
April/May/June 1996	April 1, 1995	March 31, 1996
July/August/September 1996	July 1, 1995	June 30, 1996



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You can see that fairly recent wages will be used if you file early in the quarter. When you file toward the end of a quarter, the wages used to determine your claim may not reflect any recent increases in your earnings.

Understanding the Alternate Base Period

If you are not eligible for benefits using the primary base period, and would be eligible using the alternate, D.E.T. will **automatically** use this method to determine your benefits.

When the alternate base period is used, your claim would be established based on the wages paid to you during the three most recently completed calendar quarters, plus the time between the end of the last completed quarter and the effective date of your claim. Below are some examples:

For claims effective on:	Benefits are based on wages paid	
	From:	To:
October 29, 1995	January 1, 1995	October 28, 1995
April 14, 1996	July 1, 1995	April 13, 1996
June 16, 1996	July 1, 1995	June 15, 1996
July 7, 1996	October 1, 1995	July 6, 1996

When You Can Choose the Alternate Method

Under very specific circumstances defined in the law, claimants may choose to establish their claims using the alternate method even if they would be eligible for some benefits under the primary base period.

You may be eligible for this option only if:

- Your claim was established using the "primary base period."
- Your benefit credit is less than \$9464.
- You are able to provide to D.E.T. "credible substantiation" in writing (which can include, but is not limited to, wage statements) that the total benefit credit payable to you using the "alternate base period" would be **at least 10 percent more** than the total benefit credit using the primary base period.

You are not eligible for this option if:

- Your claim was established using the "primary base period" and your benefit credit is greater than \$9463.
- Your claim was already established using the "alternate base period."

If You Do Not Agree With the Wages Reported

If you do not agree with the amount of wages reported to D.E.T. by the Department of Revenue and you can provide proof of your wages, inform the D.E.T. person who takes your claim. D.E.T. will request wage information directly from your employer.

If it is determined that you do not have enough wages under either the primary or the alternate base periods to establish a claim, or if you continue to disagree with the amount of wages reported, you have the right to file an appeal and to have a hearing.

If you have additional questions, please ask the D.E.T. claimstaker during your interview.

